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THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION

Beginning with the week ending March 29, 1919, the *Weekly Reports on Labor Conditions* show returns from only 66 cities as compared with the 122 of their former reports, a circumstance incident to the closing of the United States Employment Offices in a number of the cities. Arrangements are being made, however, by which it will be possible later to secure from the original 122 cities reports on the actual numbers of employees on the pay-rolls. The weekly summary is as follows:

WEEK ENDING	NUMBER CITIES REPORTING	NUMBER CONCERNS REPORTING	NUMBER EMPLOYEES ON PAY-ROLL	NUMBER CITIES SHOWING		PERCENTAGE SHOWING SURPLUS	NUMBER CITIES SHOWING INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AS	
				Surplus	Shortage		Unsettled	Acute
Mar. 22.....	66	3,921	1,621,413	41	9	61.1	4	4
Mar. 29.....	66	3,892	1,596,244	38	9	57.5	5	5
Apr. 5.....	60	3,560	1,461,484	36	7	60.0	3	4
Apr. 12.....	58	3,417	1,380,700	30	6	51.7	5	7
Apr. 19.....	68	3,965	1,579,295	32	6	47.0	5	8

Great caution must be used in comparing these figures with those of previous weeks. The cities still reporting are not entirely representative of the earlier group. Among the cities to be dropped from the list are nearly all of those in the great industrial states, such as Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan, where the unemployment was largest in previous weeks. It is therefore unsafe to draw inferences from the smaller percentages showing surplus or described as having unsettled industrial relations. The discrepancy comes out very clearly in the reports of actual (estimated) surplus. Eighty-three cities on March 15 reported a surplus of 371,615; of these, 43 which were dropped from the list of March 22 had a surplus of 235,575, while the remaining 40 had only 136,040. The estimate of 132,575 for the 41 cities with surplus on March 22 does, therefore, indicate a decrease over that reported for March 15, but not one of the proportions implied in the table as presented without explanations in the *Weekly Reports*. Moreover it is difficult to understand how even this decrease could have occurred in view of the fact that the actual number of men reported as on the pay-rolls has shown a gradual decline despite the steady flow of demobilized soldiers into industrial life. A conservative estimate of the numbers returning to the 66 cities of the *Reports* would average perhaps from 12,000 to 15,000 a week. That

they are not being absorbed into industry is indicated very clearly by the decrease in the average numbers of men on the pay-rolls of the three or four thousand concerns reporting. It could have been indicated much more clearly if it had been possible to get complete and accurate returns from a definite and unchanging group of representative concerns throughout the period of inquiry. Comparison of current reports with previous ones is impossible for the same reasons that operate in the case of estimated surplus. And the reports cannot, of course, average in the shops that have closed down entirely. But even as they are, it is evident from them that the long-run tendency is in the direction of lessened production.

In view of these facts it is safe to say that the actual unemployment in the country on April 5 was several times the amount indicated by the *Weekly Reports*. Granting that the original 122 cities were representative of the country as a whole, it cannot be assumed that they included practically the whole amount of unemployment or even, perhaps, the major portion of it. A safe estimate of the total unemployment on April 5 would doubtless reach 1,000,000, in addition to the 2,100,000 men still in the service.

It has of course been obvious all along in the reports from the various cities that the estimates of local unemployment were ridiculously conservative. Thus in the collection of press clippings about labor conditions the statement is found on April 5 that in St. Louis "it is estimated that unemployment has increased at the rate of 1,000 a week for the past five weeks, making a possible total of 25,000 unemployed at the present time." Yet St. Louis is listed in the tables as being "equal." There are as yet no estimates of the surplus in New York (the *American Contractor* of May 5 estimates 100,000, of whom 60,000 are in the building trades alone), and Chicago on April 5 is regarded as "equal." Incidentally this would count men in uniform who sell pencils and *Pershing's Own Story* on the streets as among the employed.

One very interesting feature of the *Weekly Reports* is the collection of press clippings on labor conditions, referred to above, arranged by localities. The information here gathered together is partial and much too unstandardized to permit of tabulation, but careful reading substantiates the general impression that labor throughout the country, and especially in the northeastern and middle western sections, is in a state of great uncertainty and unrest. Of 85 labor disputes commented upon on April 5 there were 33 strikes actually in process. Of 64 cases

in which partial reports of the causes for the disputes were obtainable, 42 involved demands for increased wages and 27 for decreased hours; 24 involved a number of miscellaneous demands (principally for the closed shop or recognition of the union); only 2 were avowedly for the purpose of preventing a lengthening of hours, and only one of preventing the lowering of wages. One instance of the actual lowering of wages, however, was noted in the press comments, but not in connection with labor disputes. A rather frequent comment was that operations in various plants had been curtailed on account of the scarcity of contracts.

WASHINGTON NOTES

A PRICE-FIXING EXPERIMENT

One incident in the process of reconstruction and adjustment to a peace basis has been the attempt on the part of the Federal Government to carry out a new plan of price fixing. On March 18 it was announced that an "Industrial Board" has been formed in the Department of Commerce for the purpose of consulting with industrial interests and bringing about a "stabilized" level of prices such as would probably stimulate business by assuring the consumer that he would be able to purchase at rates which were not likely to be undercut during his process of manufacturing and distributing the goods. This Board first undertook to bring about an agreement on the subject of steel products and succeeded in obtaining an agreement among steel manufacturers designed to carry into effect the schedule of prices which had thus been determined. The outcome was the tentative establishment of a market level of prices for steel products. This action was followed by similar undertakings in connection with coal, cement, and various others. Difficulty has been encountered during the early days of April in the refusal of various departments of the government to accept the level of prices thus agreed upon and to be guided by it in buying the products which they needed. As a result of this difference of opinion within the administration the producers have in various cases declined to adhere to a fixed schedule of prices on the ground that if the government, which is in many lines still the largest buyer, was unwilling to adhere to the arrangements so made it could not be expected that individual purchasers would do so. Consequently the whole subject has been taken up for reconsideration by the administration with a view to determining upon a uniform policy to be pursued for the future.